

K-State Research and Extension News for Nov 17, 2021

Turkey 101

Submitted by Franny Eastwood, Extension Agent

Cooking a turkey can be overwhelming whether you are cooking your first turkey or you are an experienced cook. Follow these steps to learn how to plan, cook, serve, store, and reheat turkey.

It is important to plan your menu several weeks before the holiday to cut down anxiety and stress. If you are planning to cook a turkey, you need to take the following into consideration prior to Thanksgiving or another holiday gathering. There is no difference in quality between a fresh or frozen turkey, but it is important to keep a couple things in mind when determining to buy a fresh or frozen turkey. **Fresh Turkey:** If you buy a fresh turkey, be sure to purchase it only 1-2 days before cooking. Do not buy a pre-stuffed fresh turkey. **Frozen Turkey:** You can buy a frozen turkey at any time as long as you have enough storage space in your freezer. Remember to cook a frozen turkey within 1 year for best quality. USDA recommends only buying frozen pre-stuffed turkeys that display the USDA or State mark of inspection on the packaging. The general recommendation is to allow 1 pound of fresh or frozen turkey per person.

There are three ways to thaw your turkey safely: in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave oven. The preferred method is in the refrigerator, but it is important to plan ahead. The other methods are quicker if needed. It is safe to cook a turkey from the frozen state. The cooking time will take at least 50 percent longer than recommended for a fully thawed turkey. **In the Refrigerator:** Place the frozen turkey in the original wrapper on a pan or in a container to prevent the juices from dripping on other food. Put in the refrigerator (40 °F or below) and allow approximately 24 hours per 4 to 5 pounds. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1-2 days. **In Cold Water:** If you forget to thaw the turkey or don't have room in the refrigerator for thawing, don't panic. Be sure the turkey is in a leak-proof plastic bag to prevent cross-contamination and to prevent the turkey from absorbing water. Submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. A turkey thawed in cold water should be cooked immediately. **In the Microwave Oven:** Microwave thawing is safe if the turkey is not too large. Check the manufacturer's instructions for the size of turkey that will fit into your microwave oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. Cook immediately after thawing.

There are a variety of ways to cook a turkey, but the most common is roasting. Follow these steps to safely cook a turkey: Set your oven temperature no lower than 325°F. Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling the turkey. Remove the [giblet package](#) before cooking. Place your turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan (2 to 2½ inches deep). For optimum safety, it is not recommended to stuff your turkey. Instead place stuffing in a casserole dish to cook. Use a food thermometer to check that the stuffing reaches an internal temperature of 165 °F before serving. Use the following timetables to determine how long to cook your turkey. These times are approximate. It is safe to cook a turkey from the frozen state. The cooking time will take at least 50 percent longer than recommended for a fully thawed turkey. If cooking from frozen, remember to remove the giblet packages during the cooking time.

Size	Time
4 to 8 pounds (breast)	1½ to 3¼ hours
8 to 12 pounds	2¾ to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3¾ hours
14 to 18 pounds	3¾ to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4½ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4½ to 5 hours

A whole turkey is safe when cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook turkey to higher temperatures. For quality, let the turkey stand for 20 minutes before carving to allow juices to set. The turkey will carve more easily. If your turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator, it is recommended that you also check the internal temperature with a food thermometer.

Throw out any turkey left at room temperature longer than 2 hours. If you have leftover turkey, make sure it is safe to eat by properly storing it. Cut turkey into smaller pieces and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole. Keep turkey in the refrigerator and eat within 3 to 4 days or freeze. Use frozen turkey within 2 to 6 months for best quality. Cooked turkey may be eaten cold or reheated. Follow these steps to reheat turkey. **In the oven:** Set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F. Reheat turkey to an internal temperature of 165°F. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature. To keep the turkey moist, add a little broth or water and cover. **In the microwave:** Cover your food and rotate it for even heating. Allow standing time. Heat until steaming. Check the internal temperature of your food with a food thermometer to make sure it reaches 165 °F.

Source: University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Turkey 101. <https://food.unl.edu/article/turkey-101> For more information on nutrition, food safety, health, or family and child development contact the Marais des Cygnes Extension District, or write to fmeastwo@ksu.edu or check out our website: www.maraisdescyignes.k-state.edu